RPG Reload File 067 – 'The Bard's Tale 2: The Destiny Knight'
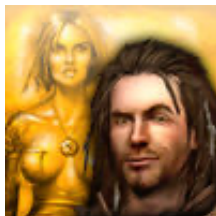
Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we always keep our drinks topped off. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past to see if it holds up in the modern day. It's a chance to revisit old favorites, reflect on classic hits, or just to take a deeper dive than our reviews typically allow for. As party leader, I try to pick a balanced plate of RPGs from week to week, but if you think I'm missing something important, please let me know. You can make suggestions by commenting below, posting in the Official RPG Reload Club thread in the forums, or by tweeting me at @RPGReload. As the schedule is planned well in advance, you probably won't see your suggestion soon, but I promise it will go on the list.

Snarls of defiance are heard from 5 Sorcerers (10').

Will your stalwart band choose to
Fight, or
Run?

Sorcerers

CHARACTER	AC	HIT	PTS	SPL	PTS	CL
1 Shaun	10	21	21	0	0	Pa
2 Carter	10	28	28	0	0	Wa
3 Eric	10	19	8	0	0	Wa
4 Jared	10	28	28	0	0	Ba
5 Fretz	10	20	20	9	9	Co
6 Taso	10	24	24	23	23	
7						

Back in 2014, when this feature was sparkly and new, one of the earliest games we tackled was *The Bard's Tale* ($2.99). Not the action-RPG that serves as the main game of that app, mind you, but the included bonus version of the original game from 1985. Well, it's not the only classic *Bard's Tale* game included in that app, and we're looking at one more of them today. *The Bard's Tale 2: The Destiny Knight* was an inevitable follow-up to the solid hit Interplay and Electronic Arts scored with the original. Like the original game, this is an old-school dungeon crawler through and through, with all of the highs and lows that implies. I'll spoil the ending of this article by telling you that this game is something you should really only play for historical purposes, and even then, it's probably the least significant and least enjoyable *Bard's Tale* game. Even in its time, *Bard's Tale 2* received a mixed reaction, and 30 extra years haven't done it many favors.

Anyway, the 1985 release of *The Bard's Tale* on the Commodore 64 had been a massive success. It had sold nearly on par with *Ultima 4*, and if you were into RPGs at that time, you know the significance of those kinds of numbers. Not bad for a *Wizardry* knock-off that Activision had reportedly turned down for being "nicheware for nerds". Ports to other platforms would increase its success, but clearly, a sequel was in order. Fortunately, Michael Cranford, the original game's designer, was willing to have another go at things, but after an alleged dispute near the end of the first game's development, he apparently wanted to do as much of it on his own as possible. At this point in history, it was hard to predict if a sequel was going to take a safe route or do something completely off the wall. In fine *Wizardry* tradition, Cranford opted for the former, building a sequel in just over a year.

CHARACTER	AC	HIT	PTS	SPL	PTS	CL
1 Carter	10	28	10	0	0	Wa
2 Fretz	10	20	3	9	9	Co
3 Taso	10	24	9	23	23	Ma
4 Shaun	10	Dead	0	0	0	Pa
5 Eric	10	Dead	0	0	0	Wa
6 Jared	10	Dead	0	0	0	
7						

The Commodore 64 version of *The Bard's Tale 2: The Destiny Knight* hit the

shelves in late 1986, and though it met with a lot more criticism than the original, it still sold quite well. It would later be ported to several other platforms, with the Apple IIGS version being the one found in the iOS app. This would be Cranford's last turn at the series he had co-created. After *Bard's Tale 2*, he left Interplay, and was only involved in a couple more games before exiting the industry. He went on to earn a Master of Divinity degree, a Ph.D. in Religion and Social Ethics, and has generally stuck to the world of academics. He's an extremely devout Christian, and you can see a lot of that in The *Bard's Tale 2*. After all, he more or less was solely responsible for this game's design. So, you'll see plenty of biblical references in *The Destiny Knight*, most notably the names of the towns, which are drawn from the New Testament.

Yes, that's towns, as in the plural form of the word. *The Bard's Tale 2* is an absolutely massive game compared to the first game. If you know what you're doing, the running time is about 40 hours, give or take, but in that time, you'll be visiting multiple towns, a wilderness, and several dungeons. It's a logical step for the series, given one of the big selling points of the first game was having a fully-realized city with a handful of dungeons, in comparison to *Wizardry*'s menu towns and single dungeons. I'm not entirely certain it was a good step for the series, but we'll get to that in a bit. The engine hasn't changed much from the first game, but there are some changes and improvements. Battles now take distance into account, a change that has serious consequences for the job class balancing. Archmages are now a separate job class rather than a title, and they have their own sets of spells, a few of which are new to the series. You can have more than one monster in your party at once now, too, so there are quite a few new ways to build your party.

The Guild

Thou art in the Guild of Adventurers.

Add a member
Remove member
Save the party
Create a member
Delete a member
Quit game
Enter the city

	CHARACTER	AC	HIT	PTS	SPL	PTS	CL
1	Shaun	10	21	21	0	0	Pa
2	Carter	10	28	28	0	0	Wa
3	Eric	10	19	19	0	0	Wa
4	Jared	10	28	28	0	0	Ba
5	Fretz	10	20	20	9	9	Co
6	Taso	10	24	24	23	23	
7							

One of the more controversial new additions are the Death Snare rooms. The story of the game has you seeking the seven pieces of the Destiny Wand, which will save the world with its magical *deus ex machina* powers. The pieces are hidden separately in special trapped rooms in each of the dungeons. The puzzles in these rooms can be pretty clever, and most of them require you to have found hints somewhere else in the game to figure out the solution. Unfortunately, these are timed challenges, something that has few places in a turn-based RPG. It's even worse in the iOS version because you're dealing with the clunky software keyboard. Early on, the time limits are fairly generous, but as any *Bard's Tale* fan knows, it only gets worse.

Before I get into my complaints, I want to praise the things the game does right. The core gameplay is still sound, some of the puzzles are quite clever,
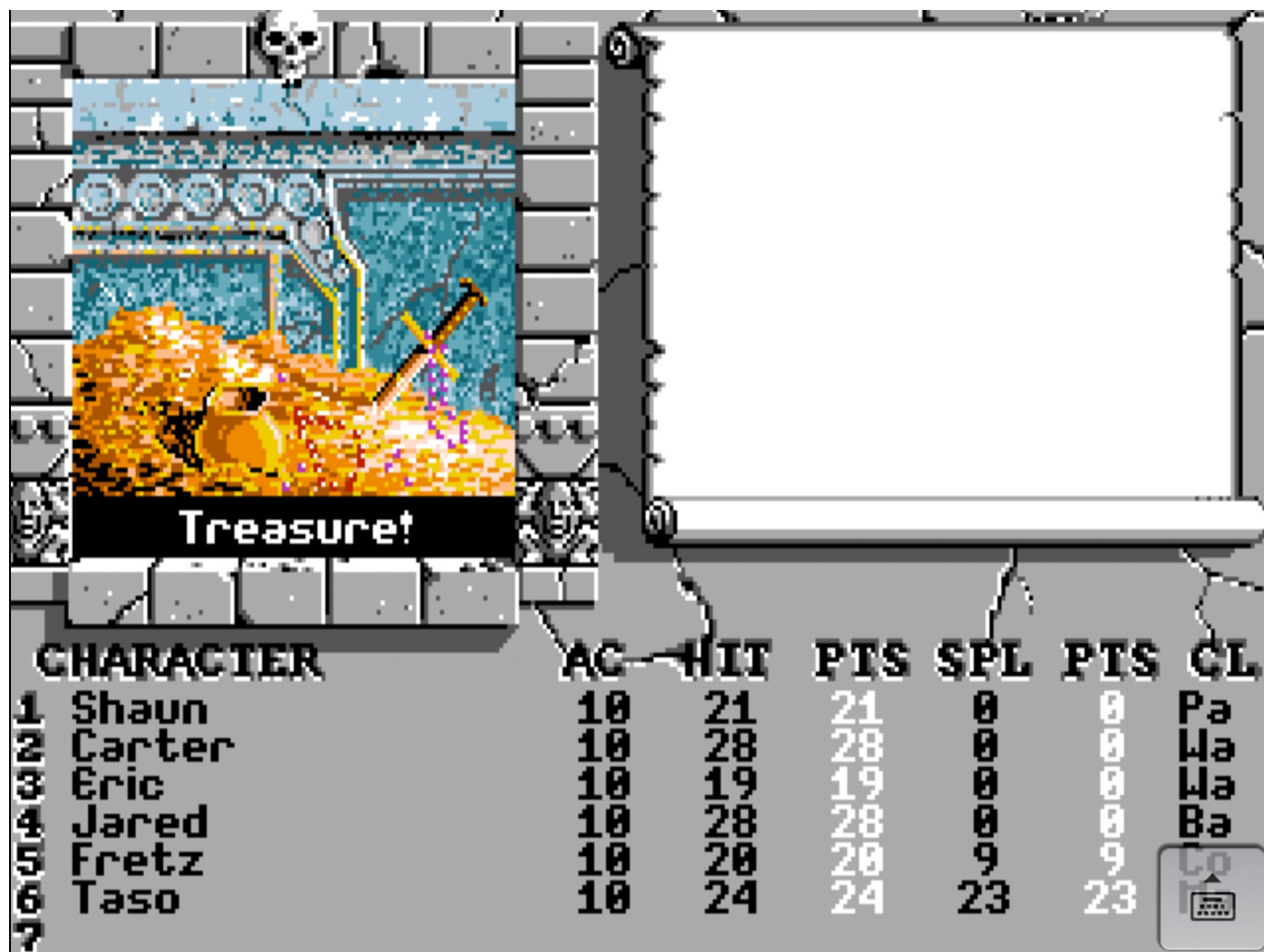
and its production values are great compared to its contemporaries. The idea of distances in battles is a good one even if its execution falters, and I appreciate the ambition of its scope. *The Bard's Tale* series sometimes gets flack for not doing enough to improve over its course, but I think if we look at its closest competitor, *Wizardry*, it was doing just fine. It just happened to be a very advanced example of a strain of RPGs that would soon be far out of vogue. It also didn't help that New World Computing's *Might And Magic* series was doing to *The Bard's Tale* what *The Bard's Tale* had done to *Wizardry*, I suppose.

Now, let me tell you why I don't like *The Bard's Tale 2*. Some of these things are problems from a modern standpoint while others were obvious even at the time. First, at this point in RPG history, it wasn't uncommon to have the player bring their characters forward from the previous game into the sequel.

You can import characters from the original *Bard's Tale*, *Ultima 3*, or *Wizardry*. That by itself isn't a problem, but like many sequels that offered such a service, *The Bard's Tale 2* seems to be balanced around the idea that you'll be bringing in your party that beat the previous game, with all their levels and equipment intact. There's a beginner's dungeon in the first town that is meant to help you get up to speed if you're rolling a new party, but it's not enough. The game gets incredibly difficult in a hurry, so you'll have to spend a lot of time grinding if you don't have a set of characters from the last game. On the other hand, *Wizardry 2* didn't even give you the option to do that, so thank heavens for small favors, I suppose.

The idea of having distances between you and the enemies that you have to close in order to use melee attacks is a neat one, potentially adding a lot of strategy to battles. Unfortunately, this game loves to park mages at a great distance away from your party. If they were just taking potshots at you while you tried to get in close, that would be acceptable enough, but they all too often prefer to summon minions. Those minions will block you from advancing until you clear them out, at which point the mages will probably summon more. The cure for this problem is in ranged attacks and magic. Especially magic. While in the first game, you needed a solid front line of bruisers, the second game heavily favors piling as many mages onto your team as possible. That way, you don't have to worry about closing distances, since you can just pick enemies off at a range.

CHARACTER	AC	HIT	PTS	SPL	PTS	CL
1 Shaun	10	21	21	0	0	Pa
2 Carter	10	28	28	0	0	Wa
3 Eric	10	19	19	0	0	Wa
4 Jared	10	28	28	0	0	Ba
5 Fretz	10	20	20	9	9	
6 Taso	10	24	24	23	23	
7						

The biggest problem with *The Bard's Tale 2*, however, is in its size. Even today, there's something immediately appealing about a huge game. A giant world full of possibilities, more levels, more hours of play, more everything! Magic words, in theory. In practice, however, a game really shouldn't go on much longer than its ideas can sustain it. That's going to be different for every game, of course, but in the case of *The Bard's Tale*, the first game ran just a little bit longer than it ideally should have. The second game goes wildly over that line, and while some might appreciate that it's the dungeon crawler that keeps on crawling, even I hit a point where I wondered if the game had anything more to show me. It didn't. And then it went on another 25 hours. The Death Snare puzzles are interesting, but they're small slices in a game that otherwise leans on massive battles with dozens of enemies at once and extremely familiar dungeon crawler tricks like spinners and dark areas.

All that said, it's fun for a while. If you pace it out carefully, you might even enjoy the whole thing. I feel like the best part of the game is near the beginning, however, and on this replay I was happy enough just to play the first couple of dungeons and call it a day. Playing it using the software keyboard wasn't exactly optimal, but I appreciate the little things the developer did to try and help, like adding arrow keys to the UI and making all sorts of documents easily accessible. I'd love to see proper ports of this series come to iOS with more considerations for the interface, but it's hard to argue with what we got due to them being freebies. Plus, I still don't see any of the original *Wizardry* or *Might & Magic* games around in any form on the App Store, so *The Bard's Tale* is still one step ahead of the game. If you enjoy any of the classic *Bard's Tale* games and want something on your iOS device that's a bit more palatable, I'd recommend *Silversword* ([$3.99](#)), which heavily homages this series and actually improves on it in a few ways.

CHARACTER	AC	HIT PTS	SPL PTS	CL
1 Brian the Fist	3	30 30	0 0	Pa
2 Samson	3	28 27	0 0	Wa
3 El Cid	2	20 20	0 0	Ba
4 Markus	4	24 19	0 0	Ro
5 Merlin	9	16 16	20 20	Co
6 Omar	9	20 20	14 14	Co
7				

That's just what I think of *The Bard's Tale 2*, though. What do you all think? Does anyone have any happy memories of this one they can offer? If so, please leave a comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). I'd also like to give a gentle reminder that features like the **RPG Reload** are heavily dependent on [the TouchArcade Patreon](#) and its supporters. If you enjoy this feature, please consider tossing in a buck or two so that we can keep on giving coverage to games you'll probably never see in the App Store charts. As for me, I'll be back next week with another RPG. Thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload: *Legends Of Yore* [($1.99)](#)